Discussion Questions

*Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*
by Jung Chang

Source: Madison Public Library and fireandwater.com

1. What do you think is the aim of *Wild Swans*? To enlighten a dark period of Chinese history or just to tell a family story?

2. How personal is this book? Is it “popular history” or family memoir? What, if anything, does Jung Chang hold back? Could the book be any more honest?

3. How is the way people cope with difficult and challenging situations defined by gender? How true would it be to suggest that only the women are capable of compromise, while the men have the luxury of being interchangeable? Are there any exceptions to this rule?

4. Jung Chang illustrates her progressive disillusionment with Mao in the book. Do we understand her “worship” of the cult of Mao and is it described vividly enough for us to empathize?

5. How do we feel about Communism whilst reading the book? Is it a surprise to be believing in it at points? Are we as disillusioned with Communism as we are with Mao at the end of the book and how much blame do we apportion to the man rather than the movement? How much is down to the personal nature of the book?

6. Which are the strongest relationships in *Wild Swans*? How is the bond between mother and daughter shown as being different (stronger) than other relationships? How does Jung Chang’s relationship with her father challenge the dominant strength of mother/daughter relationships?

7. How does the reader feel about Chang-Shou Yu’s “incorruptibleness”? Does it make him a bad husband/father and do we admire him in the way his daughter does? Can we perceive the man other than through the rose-tinted vision of his daughter?

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8. Which era is more alien to the reader – the youth of Jung Chang or that of her grandmother? How difficult is it to believe that the Cultural Revolution was taking place at the same time as events like Woodstock?

9. How do the close family bonds shown sit at odds with the demands of Communism? Considering the father’s unbending loyalty to the party, why/how does the family remain so close? Is it a link back to a China of the past or a way of surviving the China of the present?

10. Would you say that Mao never really loses his god-like status in the reader’s eyes, despite Jung Chang’s disillusionment? If so, why?